



**CREATIVE**

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**SUPER SLOW WAY**

**TALENT DEVELOPMENT FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE**



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## TALENT DEVELOPMENT FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE

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### CASE STUDY THEME

- › Talent development for socially engaged practice

## PROJECT SUMMARY

Super Slow Way is a programme of arts and cultural activity in Pennine Lancashire. The programme works with the communities along the Leeds and Liverpool canal from Blackburn to Pendle, which was the original 'Super Highway' of the Industrial Revolution that transformed Pennine Lancashire into the epicentre of global commerce and culture.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the programme is to stage a new, creative revolution powered by art and people, by exploring what art is and what it means to the people of Pennine Lancashire. The key themes of the programme are manufacturing past and present, the natural environment and the digital world. It also seeks to understand how local people relate to their environment, neighbourhoods and to each other to experiment with new approaches and show how art can transform lives and places. Super Slow Way is one of 21 Creative People and Places (CPP) programmes funded by Arts Council England, and it is delivered by a consortium comprised of the Canal & River Trust, Arts Partners in Pennine Lancashire (APPL), and social enterprise Newground<sup>2</sup>. Super Slow Way also works in partnership with four local authorities: Pendle Borough Council, Burnley Borough Council, Hyndburn Borough Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, which makes this one of the largest partnerships of Local Authorities across the CPP programme.

<sup>1</sup> [superslowway.org.uk/about](http://superslowway.org.uk/about)

<sup>2</sup> Newground is a Blackburn-based social enterprise which supports local communities, businesses and organisations with all profits going to a charity for environmental and community projects.

A key feature of Super Slow Way's CPP programme is to support and develop models of socially engaged art practice. Social arts practice is an art medium that focuses on social engagement, inviting collaboration with individuals, communities, and institutions in the creation of participatory art. It aims to benefit a local area or society as a main outcome of the work over and above the artistic product and the artworks can take any form that involves people as collaborators, co-producers, co-creators. In order to achieve this Super Slow Way realised that it was necessary to identify and address the professional development needs of local artistic and creative practitioners. It saw CPP as a unique opportunity to offer an alternative arts schooling which specifically focused on socially engaged practice.

**“[In my view] there’s nowhere in the UK that teaches socially engaged [arts] practice... which is bizarre because socially engaged practice is the fastest growing and most significant element of how art practice is changing globally, yet the UK education system is not responding to that.”** CPP Place Director

The other three CPP Places in the North West also recognised the need and value of developing this kind of professional development offer which led to the co-development of the Faculty of Social Arts Practice. The Faculty is a dedicated creative learning initiative for artists and creatives living and working in the North West of England. The concept was developed initially by Super Slow Way and Heart of Glass, as the Faculty's priorities linked to these CPP Places' wider ambitions around the field of social and collaborative arts practice. Together Chrissie Tiller, initiator and director of the MA in Participatory and Community Arts at Goldsmiths, and In-Situ<sup>3</sup>, a local artist-led not-for-profit organisation in Pendle working closely with Super Slow Way, lead on the Faculty programme. The partnership with, and support from, Creative Scene and LeftCoast has created a unique joint initiative across the four CPP Places in the North West.

This case study looks at Super Slow Way's relationship to the Faculty, some of that ways the Faculty has supported artistic development in Pennine Lancashire, and the impact and outcomes of the Faculty in relation to the wider work of Super Slow Way. It also examines the key outcomes of the Super Slow Way programme, including what worked well and less well and the main lessons that have been learned. This case study draws on interviews with Super Slow Way staff as well as staff and members (artists) of the Faculty.



*Kinara Festival. Photo: Matthew Savage*

<sup>3</sup> in-situ.org.uk

## KEY FINDINGS

- › Super Slow Way is a programme with socially engaged practice and action research at its core. It is designed to be responsive to both its geographical and social context and to draw on local people's ideas, voices and priorities.
- › Super Slow Way's approach to socially engaged practice was an important driver and influence for the Faculty.
- › The Faculty has been able to nurture a number of aspiring artists and raise their awareness and knowledge of socially engaged art practices. Over time this will slowly help to increase the local arts offer as some of the Faculty members have continued to work with the local communities, such the Girls of the Gannow project<sup>4</sup> in Burnley.
- › Six local artists and practitioners from Pennine Lancashire have benefitted from the professional development learning opportunities on offer through the Faculty, which have enabled them to develop their artistic practice, practical skills, critical thinking and social networks in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

Pennine Lancashire is located in the North West of England between Leeds, Greater Manchester and Preston. The area has a rich industrial heritage synonymous with its success during the Industrial Revolution and its long history within the textile industry. The Leeds-Liverpool canal was the artery of this region taking goods in and out of Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley. In its heyday, the area produced around half of the world's cotton via its mills, hills and waterways.<sup>5</sup>

Like many other post-industrial hubs in the North of England, Pennine Lancashire is today characterised by higher than average levels of long-term unemployment and ill health. There has also been change in the make-up of the local population and it is now home to a high concentration of minority ethnic groups from South Asia. Pennine Lancashire has a diverse cultural make-up and a rugged countryside which gives the place its unique identity. Despite a history of unemployment, there are signs of a growing local economy underpinned by an advanced manufacturing base of aerospace, automotive and precision engineering, telecommunications and computer-based products.<sup>6</sup> Some sections of the canal have had a new lease of life with new homes, businesses and leisure facilities located along its banks, which has improved the attractiveness of the area for local residents and visitors alike.

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Wren worked with local women in Gannow to map their stories through artwork, including artwork on kitchen tiles installed in the community and tea towels which were distributed to all new females in the community as an invitation to become a 'Girl of the Gannow.' The idea was developed in response to there being a rift between new renters and long term residents in the community.

<sup>5</sup> [visitengland.com/northernengland/experience/visit-birthplace-industrial-revolution](https://www.visitengland.com/northernengland/experience/visit-birthplace-industrial-revolution) with all profits going to a charity for environmental and community projects.

<sup>6</sup> [lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/13347492.Pennine\\_Lancashire\\_has\\_been\\_a\\_success\\_story\\_since\\_the\\_industrial\\_revolution](https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/13347492.Pennine_Lancashire_has_been_a_success_story_since_the_industrial_revolution)

Pennine Lancashire has a lower than average level of engagement with the arts. According to Super Slow Way, many local people felt disconnected from the arts as they perceived that the arts are not relevant to them or they were put off by the narrow range of artistic activities on offer locally.

**“A high proportion of the population have a very narrow concept of what art is... A very small proportion actually goes to museums, galleries, or theatres...**

**Art has much more impact when people can be proactive within it and make and create it on their own terms within their own context.” CPP Place Director**

## APPROACH TO TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Super Slow Way's programme features a combination of community commissions, artist residencies and strategic commissions, all of which involve artists working with individuals, communities, businesses and others. The Faculty was seen as an exciting opportunity for Super Slow Way, Creative Scene, Heart of Glass and LeftCoast to pool together their expertise and resources with the aim of nurturing local talent, building capacity in the sector, and improving the sustainability of CPP in the North West. It was also regarded as an interesting and innovative partnership model as it was the first time that a group of CPP Places had come together to collaborate on an ambitious joint-initiative of this nature. The Faculty was also born out of recognition of the limited professional development opportunities available to artists and creative practitioners within the identified geographic areas, but also within the context of social arts practice more broadly.

**“The model has emerged from a shared interrogation of the kind of learning that might best support the increasing number of artists, and others, wanting to engage in collaborative and social arts practice. The decision to set up this model outside the confines of academia was inevitably influenced by a shared concern for the growing lack of diversity and access within higher education, as fees and the imperative to earn money become the driving force of many institutions.”<sup>7</sup>**

The Faculty was launched in December 2015, initially as a pilot programme. A call out was announced, with the intention of finding 20 artists, practitioners, curators and producers from diverse backgrounds, but with no specific requirements in terms of educational background, previous training or current level of engagement in creative practice.

When the Faculty was conceptualised, its core mission was not just about growing talent and local opportunities for artists and creative people in the North West, but also to establish a regional network of artists with a common interest in socially engaged practice. The Faculty looks for practitioners that can demonstrate a strong interest in socially engaged art and a commitment to learn and to work with peers to explore interdisciplinary collaborative art and social practice.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Tiller, C. and Fox, P. (2017) (eds.) PRAXIS Vol 1: Of People, Place & Time. Heart of Glass & Live Art Development Agency. [thisisunbound.co.uk/products/praxis-vol-1-of-people-place-time](http://thisisunbound.co.uk/products/praxis-vol-1-of-people-place-time)

<sup>8</sup> The Faculty (2015) Launching The Faculty – Call for Participants: The Faculty: creating an alternative learning environment for those engaged, or wanting to engage, in social arts practice [leftcoast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/THE-FACULTY1.doc](http://leftcoast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/THE-FACULTY1.doc)

Successful artists become members of the Faculty and engage in a six-month programme of online, 'distance learning' tutorials, seminars, discussions, assignments and four residencies (hosted by each of the four CPPs). The Faculty offers the following opportunities to its members:

- › **Mentoring** – The Faculty provides its members with mentors who are highly regarded practitioners and commissioned artists.
- › **Practical skills** – Masterclasses led by experienced professionals on themes and topics such as, communications and marketing, documentation, financial management, practical tools and tips, and fundraising.
- › **Critical thinking** – Short courses of 1-3 days with experienced practitioners focusing on some of the more conceptual considerations of this mode of artistic practice, such as working with 'high risk' communities, shared authorship, the ethics of participation, and power and privilege.
- › **Networking** – Four meet-ups (one in each location) for the artists. A social gathering is organised as part of the meet-up, with some 'studio visits' and peer portfolio reviews.
- › **Cross location small commissions** – Small joint commissions for artists to pair up across geographies to deliver projects that engage with their communities.<sup>9</sup>

The Faculty's ethos is strongly aligned and complementary to Super Slow Way's approach, as its programme is intrinsically about developing socially engaged art and strengthening artists' relationships with communities through socially engaged practices. Its action research approach has dedicated a lot of space and time for the programme to respond to the community's specific needs with the aim of delivering more sustainable local arts engagement in the long term.



Exbury Egg. Photo: Sam Walsh

<sup>9</sup> The Faculty (2016) The Faculty of Social Arts Practice – Next steps discussion paper

**“Super Slow Way as a project is really rooted in socially engaged practice. The key thing for all CPP Places when they decided to set the Faculty up was that if we haven’t got any artists who are really well trained in that way of working then it’s not very sustainable to continue to offer those kind of opportunities and we need good talented people working in those ways... so it’s not just parachuting somebody in and then yanking them out again because money’s run out.”** Faculty staff

**“The Faculty of Social Arts Practice represents an innovative experimental platform to explore and play with the demands and opportunities of social practice, taking advantage of the presence of its leading exponents visiting and working in our communities over the coming year.”** CPP Place Director

With a vision of developing artistic talent and strengthening social arts practices in Pennine Lancashire and the North West CPP areas, this approach enables programmes to be further embedded in the local communities and reflective of the diverse range of interests and expertise of local people. By drawing on people’s local knowledge, this is allowing Super Slow Way to experiment with a wealth of ideas and activities and for the programme to grow organically.

## OUTCOMES

Based on the interviews with Super Slow Way and the Faculty staff, work done by both the Faculty and the CPP programme have started to change the way in which art is practiced and has influenced the scale and quality of socially engaged art in Pennine Lancashire. Faculty members across all four CPP Places have benefitted greatly from being part of a network of creative people which is leading to increased interaction, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. The Faculty has helped to strengthen both the professional and amateur arts communities across the North West by helping to provide development and learning opportunities, and it creates a space and dialogue where innovation and collaboration can thrive.

**“The Faculty was life changing... I think being a part of a peer group of people at different stages of their career across the north of England is the most valuable part as now we have a natural network we call on when we have ideas and opportunities.”** Faculty member

**“I think the Faculty has been quite transformational for a lot of the people who have been on it... We’ve had people who have left their jobs and are now working as artists full time, and other people that hadn’t really thought about themselves as artists but worked in a similar kind of socially engaged way are now looking at art as a tool that they can use or as a way of partnering with people to bring other things into the work that they do.”** Community Catalyst

According to Super Slow Way's Faculty members, being part of the Faculty has also given them greater confidence with their practical skills and experience of leading projects in their communities. One of the Faculty members has also since joined Super Slow Way as a paid freelance Community Projects Assistant.

**“For me it has given me the confidence in taking what I am doing seriously and respecting the work I am doing on a more professional level... It has also given me belief that the art world takes many forms and there is a place for me within it... I really feel part of something important that could grow. I think everyone involved left the Faculty more professional and confident.”** Faculty member

## WHAT WORKED WELL

- **Identifying talent development needs** – Super Slow Way played a key role in identifying the talent development needs of local artists, which led to the co-development of the Faculty. It has so far supported six faculty members who have benefitted from a unique initiative, which is now beginning to lay the foundations that will help to build a more ‘long-term, organic arts infrastructure’ in the area.

**“Super Slow Way have really taken me seriously as an artist and have given me the chance to further projects based on work I have already done in the area. They have also been really supportive in helping me achieve projects and I think are creating something really special in Lancashire that feels a lot more important than your average arts organisation. I think by finding local talents across the north and creating a network of peers and information the CPPs are helping to build a more long term organic arts infrastructure in their local areas that isn't dependant on the CPP organisations being there.”** Faculty member

- **Action Research needs** – Super Slow Way played a key role in identifying the talent development needs of local artists, which led to the co-development of the Faculty. It has so far supported six faculty members who have benefitted from a unique initiative, which is now beginning to lay the foundations that will help to build a more ‘long-term, organic arts infrastructure’ in the area.

**“I think what's nice is because it is an action research project, they have that space to explore things, to wander and see what happens when you do something, and because that's done with high levels of integrity and ethics, what you get out at the other end is pretty good stuff.”** Faculty staff

- › **Support for engaging diverse audiences** – Many Super Slow Way projects and activities aim to engage with the diverse communities of Pennine Lancashire. Super Slow Way has explored ways it can actively support its artists to achieve this, e.g. Beyond Labels: In Young Men’s Shoes which connects young men with artists to allow them to explore their identity and creativity, Kinara Festival which celebrates Islamic culture, and Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope which brought people from all walks of life together to share food, culture and experiences.

“**[Faculty member] has been working on a social cohesion project this year, I think the Faculty has equipped her with the understanding of the need to respond to context, and how to do that and how you enter a community and set up relationships that enable some coming together and developing trust.**” CPP Place Director

## LESSONS LEARNT

- › **Mapping the landscape of artistic practice** – Valuable learning and intelligence has also come from the hundreds of applications that were made to the Faculty. It has helped all four CPP Places to develop a deeper understanding of the artistic and creative practitioners in their area and this was used to inform thinking around how the Faculty was developed.<sup>10</sup>
- › **Limited time and resources** – Although some good progress has been made around talent development through the co-development and piloting of the Faculty, the three year timeframe of CPP has been a challenge for Super Slow Way, as socially engaged art practice is by its nature a ‘slow process of learning and un-learning’.<sup>11</sup> However, Super Slow Way’s soft and slow approach has demonstrated how its strong ethos of socially engaged practice can prove a valuable way of overcoming some of the barriers of working in challenging local contexts.



*Mill Workers reunion. Photo: Richard Tymon*

<sup>10</sup> Smethurst, A. and Nelken, M. (2017) “Each to their own” A report exploring approaches to Talent Development across the Creative People and Places network

<sup>11</sup> Kester, G. (2011) The One and The Many. Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context

## ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

As with all CPP Places, Super Slow Way aims to achieve excellence in community engagement and artistic practice through its programmes. However, its commitment to socially engaged practice and its role in the co-development of a programme of opportunities for developing artists' skills and confidence through socially engaged art goes a long way towards quality creative processes and community engagement.

**“I think their approach to working with communities is as good as it probably can be... I think that a lot of things that they’ve done have been quite risky, but calculated risks and well thought through and mitigated... which has allowed them to be a lot freer and I think that’s been the best thing about the programme.”** Faculty staff



Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope.  
Photo: Guzzellian

## SHAPES OF WATER SOUNDS OF HOPE

Super Slow Way commissioned US public artist Suzanne Lacy<sup>12</sup> to work with the people of Pendle to create a mass participation artwork at Brierfield Mill. Suzanne, who is renowned for her socially engaged artworks, developed Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope with Pendle artist collective In-Situ.

Suzanne worked closely with Pendle residents in a series of community meetings and singing sessions, exploring the history of the area, the former Smith & Nephew Mill and different vocal traditions that exist there. Super Slow Way and In-Situ used their links and networks in the community and social media to bring people from all walks of life together to share food, culture and experiences; culminating in a mass community celebration with Shape Note singers and Sufi chanters.<sup>13</sup>

Local people were invited to a large banquet for 500 people and to take part by observing performances and participating in singing sessions. The textile industry had brought many people to Pennine Lancashire and the event was an opportunity for local people to share their stories and experiences of the mill and living in Pendle, as well as their cultures and traditions.

One of the Faculty members also had the opportunity to work with the filmmaker of Shapes of Water Sounds of Hope and interviewed over 50 people as part of the project.

<sup>12</sup> [www.suzannelacy.com/recent-works/#/sounds-of-hope](http://www.suzannelacy.com/recent-works/#/sounds-of-hope)

<sup>13</sup> [superslowway.org.uk/projects/shapes-of-water-sounds-of-hope](http://superslowway.org.uk/projects/shapes-of-water-sounds-of-hope)

**“In the past month I had the privilege of building a research project in collaboration with Mao Mollona<sup>14</sup> and the filmmaker Graham Kay. More than 50 people from Pendle came over to Brierfield Mill and shared with us their thoughts around the past, present and future of work in this region... I have been able to experience Suzanne’s incredible power to generate connective energies between people. It is these connections, which are crucial for the life and future of the Pendle community.” Faculty member**



*Beyond Labels. Photo: Saqib Choudry*

## SUSTAINABILITY

Super Slow Way’s main priority for CPP is to ensure that their programme creates a lasting legacy of arts and culture in Pennine Lancashire. Through its socially engaged approach to talent development it aims to grow and sustain the local arts infrastructure. The hope is, through its commitment to developing artistic talent by supporting those whose work centres around relationships between people and place, that a greater foundation is created on which to build and grow an arts infrastructure that is responsive to the needs of the area with a population that has a greater connection to the arts on offer. For example, Super Slow Way is supporting In-Situ with talent development as part of their In-Residence programme. One of the ideas which are currently being considered is creating a linear park along the canal as a legacy of the programme.

**“The Faculty is intended to create a deepened art ecology of place and a cohort of locally based practitioners who will provide a legacy for the Creative People and Places programmes involved.”<sup>15</sup>**

Super Slow Way is also looking at sustaining their CPP programme by partnering with a local Higher Education Institution, which would help to bring additional expertise and resources to the programme.

<sup>14</sup> Massimiliano (Mao) Mollona is a writer, filmmaker and anthropologist

<sup>15</sup> Tiller, C. and Fox, P. (2017) (eds.) PRAXIS Vol 1: Of People, Place & Time. Heart of Glass & Live Art Development Agency. [www.thisisunbound.co.uk/products/praxis-vol-1-of-people-place-time](http://www.thisisunbound.co.uk/products/praxis-vol-1-of-people-place-time)

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